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C O N F I D E N T I A L PESHAWAR 000100

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TAGS: MOPS PREF PTER PGOV EAID PK

SUBJECT: MALAKAND DIVISION: SWAT OPERATION CONTINUES

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. From May 8, the Pakistani army has stepped up its operations in Swat, concentrating its efforts on the areas south of the central Khwazakhela region. A relaxation of the curfew in Swat on May 10 allowed large numbers of residents to flee lower Swat. According to initial estimates, more than 100,000 people have left Swat and more are expected (further details on the IDP situation septel). Fighting continued in northern Buner and has intensified in Shangla as the Pakistani military has moved to secure Shangla. The spillover of the Swat operation was evident in Lower Dir and Malakand districts, where militants apparently fleeing Swat were engaged by Pakistani military forces. Meanwhile, the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) government moved ahead with its implementation of the Nizam i-Adl regulation. On May 11, Prime Minister Gilani called a special session of the National Assembly to discuss the situation in Swat and the humanitarian situation surrounding the growing number of IDPs. End summary.

ARMY INITIATES OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN SWAT

¶12. (C) Beginning May 8, after PM Gilani's May 7 speech vowing to "eliminate" the Taliban (reftel), the Pakistani army increased the intensity of its operations in Swat. The army focused its initial operations on lower Swat, particularly the areas around Mingora and Saidu Sharif, Swat's largest city and headquarters respectively; beginning May 10, intense fighting was also reported in the reputed militant centers of Matta and Khawazakhela, north of Mingora in central Swat.

¶13. (C) In a round of calls on May 11, Peshawar PO and Islamabad Political Counselor met with 11th Corps Commander General Masood, Frontier Corps Commander General Tariq, NWFP Governor Ghani, and NWFP Chief Minister Hoti. General Masood and CM Hoti separately characterized operation in Swat as in the "early stages" and expected the military campaign there would take months at least. CM Hoti said that 15-20,000 additional forces were being brought in from Sialkot for "ground operations" which have not yet begun.

¶14. (C) Militant activity in Swat reportedly continued over this period; press accounts reported them as looting banks and destroying two boys' schools. The Pakistani military claimed in a press statement May 10 to have killed nearly two hundred militants in Swat over the May 9-10 period. It also claimed to have secured Mingora, but according to consulate contacts,

militants remain in a few strategic buildings and many vacated houses. Consulate contacts were critical of the artillery- and aerial bombardment-heavy nature of Pakistani military operations, but seemed resigned to it as the price of ridding the area of militants.

IDPs

¶ 15. (C) On May 10, the curfew that had been in place in Swat since May 5 was lifted for a preannounced six hours to allow civilians to flee their homes before operations resumed in earnest. The curfew relaxation was then extended for an additional three hours as it became clear that the jammed roads would not allow residents to flee in time for the curfew to be reimposed. Press reports estimated and Consulate contacts in Mingora agreed that approximately 90% of the residents of Mingora had left the city. Consulate contacts also reported that the city was now without electricity and running water. North of Khwazakhela, most residents remained in their homes, as Swat's district coordination officer announced that there would be "no operation" in Upper Swat and in any case they would have been unable to exit Swat in the time provided by the curfew relaxation. CM Hoti expressed concerned that fleeing militants might be joining the IDP flow south, with the aim of beginning operations from the IDP camps.

¶ 16. (C) CM Hoti who had just visited an IDP camp in Mardan with PML leader Nawaz Sharif emphasized the importance of showing "progress" in the military campaign to maintain public support. Taking care of IDPs, the CM said, was the top priority. General Masood told PO and PolCouns that General Nadeem who had headed Pakistan's earthquake relief effort in 2005 is being brought in to coordinate the IDP emergency. 11th Corps is providing space at its headquarters for General Nadeem. (Note: Additional staffing for General Nadeem, however, was unclear.)

ARMY SECURES LOWER SHANGLA; FIGHTING CONTINUES IN BUNER

¶ 17. (C) Security forces in Shangla reportedly fought through improvised roadside bombs and fierce militant resistance at a bridge in Chamtalai to secure important heights in Shangla and advance to Biladram town. The government also reported destroying a Taliban training center at Banai Baba, where it said that up to 150 militants were killed. Frontier Corps Commander General Tariq told PO and PolCouns that operations continue in northern Buner. Sultanwas and the passes between Buner and Swat must still be secured.

Operations in Lower Dir

¶ 18. (C) General Tariq said that some operations are still taking place in Lower Dir. The primary area of concern, he explained, was at Chakdarra which lies at the intersection between the Swat and Dir valleys. Local press reported that FC intercepted militant forces moving out of Swat at the village of Osakai on the night of May 9-10, leading to an all-night battle. According to SOC-FWD, air support is being diverted away from remaining FC activity in Buner and Lower Dir to the Swat operation. In Malakand district, militants surrounded and attacked a security checkpoint in the Palai area manned by levies; according to press reports, militants also blocked the roads linking Malakand district to Mardan and Dargai.

NWFP GOVERNMENT MOVES AHEAD WITH NIZAM-E-ADL

¶ 19. (SBU) Peshawar High Court registrar Qalandar Ali Khan announced in a press briefing that the government had approved 94 new illaqa qazis (judges dealing with minor crimes) and six new izafi zilla qazis (judges dealing with major crimes), in addition to the two Darul Qaza (superior court) judges already named by the government. Due to ongoing operations in the area, the named qazis will not be immediately able to begin work. The registrar also noted that Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry had

approved accelerated procedures for cutting down the backlog of civil cases and petty-crime prosecutions, which would be presented at the upcoming May 16 meeting of the National Judicial Policymaking Committee.

TRACY